

Erie County Farmer Learns the Benefits of Soil Health with NRCS

By Hannah Albright

Mike Kania has been farming in Erie, Pennsylvania since 2007. The farm has been in his family since 1948; Kania has since purchased additional land to expand the operation to 260 acres. When soil erosion became a concern on some of his crop fields, Kania turned to the help of USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Moldboard plowing was originally done on the farm, before Kania switched to disking. After learning about the benefits of no-till and cover crops, Kania wanted to implement both practices on his operation. NRCS's Environmental Quality Initiatives Program (EQIP) has allowed him to justify any loss while adjusting to this change; for example, the planter box bouncing and not evenly planting the seed.

"The two reasons I love no-till is because it allows me to farm ethically and economically," said Kania, "it's the only way I could do it with this many acres."

Time management is very important to Kania because he works alone and does not plan

to hire anyone to help him on the farm. He has calculated how much time it takes him to plant with his four row no-till planter and figured he could plant up to 300 acres, but he would not be able to do that many acres with conventional tillage.

By implementing no-till and cover crop practices on his operation, Kania has learned the benefits of building soil health. He does a soil test every year by purchasing ten soil sampling kits; he groups his land by soil type and takes samples within each group. Kania has already noticed an increase in potassium and phosphorous on the acreage that rye was added into the rotation.

Currently, 200 of the 260 acres are being farmed where Kania grows corn grain, soybeans, rye, and oats. The remaining 60 are enrolled in NRCS's Conservation Reserve Easement Program (CREP). About 50 acres consist of cool season grasses, while the other ten acres are warm season grasses.

The farmland is located in the French Creek Watershed, which encompasses roughly 1,250 square miles of land. By preserving the natural land surrounding the watershed, Kania is playing a part in establishing habitat for hundreds of species and maintaining good water quality.



No-till soybean field in spring of 2021.